

Literary Analysis

To analyze is to break something down into smaller pieces.

What happens?

First, you identify what happens within a work. This process reveals the most important plot points that give credence to the thesis of the essay. This should not take up much space in an essay. By understanding your audience, you know that this is not where the focus of your essay needs to be. Students who spend too much time focusing on this area end up with a book report rather than an analysis.

Why does it happen?

After identifying what happens, you have to tell why those events happen. This process breaks down the event and allows the reader to begin to see the importance of the event. Often, this is the point where speculation from the writer occurs. Speculation and opinion are not bad in critical writing; however, they are strengthened when you choose to use quotations from the work and outside critical support to bolster your writing.

Why does it matter?

Finally, you show why the events matter to the work and thesis as a whole. Through this process, the reader is able to see how the events illuminate the meaning of the work as whole. The writer is able to move beyond writing a book report and to begin creating an analytical proof. If you have completed this level of the analysis, you have proved a point rather than just told about the literary work.